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Wednesday, 29 September 2004, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Ping ..... (Gabon)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Address by Mr. Alvaro Uribe Vélez, President of the Republic of Colombia

The President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will hear an address by the President of the Republic of Colombia.

Mr. Alvaro Uribe Vélez, President of the Republic of Colombia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Alvaro Uribe Vélez, President of the Republic of Colombia, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Uribe Vélez (*spoke in Spanish*): I am addressing the General Assembly once again, at a time when the people and the institutions of Colombia are making great progress in their struggle to achieve democratic security. Such security would enable all citizens to live in peace, express their political views without putting their lives in danger and to support or oppose the Government while fully respecting different opinions.

That policy has made significant progress in reducing murders, kidnappings and other terrorist acts, as well as population displacement and the growing of illicit drug crops. There is still a great deal to be done, but if we are persistent we will prevail.

Democratic security is one of Colombia's highest priorities if we are to regain credibility and if our citizens are once again to have confidence in our institutions. When trust is destroyed, the ties between the citizen and the nation are broken. Such trust requires transparency in public and private actions, as well as economic revitalization and social cohesion.

Social cohesion builds trust among citizens and between citizens and the State. Social cohesion is the enemy of poverty and helps to promote equal opportunities. Colombia has established a legal framework to ensure that the benefits of economic growth lead to poverty eradication. Yet Colombia's growth, which during the 1960s and 1970s was averaging 4.5 per cent a year, fell to an average of 2 per cent after 1980. That decline encouraged the informal economy, and was accompanied by poverty. The contrast became increasingly obvious between the formal private sector — which was fair with its workers and complied with its tax payments, but which grew at a slow pace — and the informal sector, which, with its overwhelming influence, drew in the destitute masses.

Drug trafficking, which bankrolls terrorism, reversed the trend towards land distribution, through agrarian reform and the natural process of inheritance from one generation to the next.

Between 1994 and 2000, unemployment among heads of household grew from 4 per cent to 10 per cent, and overall unemployment grew from 7.5 per cent to 19 per cent. In relatively few years, the deficit

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increased from 1.5 per cent to 4.2 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP), public debt rose from 24 per cent to 54 per cent of GDP and 40 per cent of the public budget was allocated to debt servicing and repayment. Very low levels of private investment only made the situation worse.

Defeating poverty requires strong and sustained economic growth. This in turn requires physical and legal security, transparent regulations and macroeconomic stability. Last year, Colombia forecast growth of 2.5 per cent — but growth was close to 4 per cent. This year we are endeavouring to achieve 5 per cent growth. We are able to do because we are restoring confidence among investors. With such growth, unemployment has fallen three points, although it is still quite high. A positive sign is that jobs are being created in sectors that will provide for social security and fair wages for workers. All that has happened despite fiscal restrictions to public investment and in the midst of an intense struggle to eliminate illicit drugs, which have become so significant that they now affect whether there will be positive or negative growth in our agricultural sector.

At one time, my generation explained violence as the result of social inequities. My country's experience over many decades allows me to affirm that terrorist violence has increased poverty and has destroyed the possibility of eliminating social inequity. Violence has worsened poverty and has exploited it to perpetuate itself.

Our goal is to reduce poverty at a rate equal to or higher than economic growth. To a great extent, our social investment programme depends on sound and sustained economic growth. Therefore, our social investment programme goes hand in hand with our democratic security policy. If we neglect security measures that respect democratic values, terrorism will grow, we will lose momentum in defeating it, investment will be affected, the strength of our economic recovery will weaken and we could be left without resources for social investment.

Today's equality lies in economic and social opportunity. That is why we have placed so much emphasis on education. We have increased elementary school enrolment by 750,000, but the country still needs classroom space for 1.25 million new pupils. In 25 months we have increased technical training by two and a half times, promoting basic employment skills to enable young people to join the work force while continuing their studies. In the cities and in the countryside, we have been carrying out a silent revolution in technical training that will reach 4 million young people a year by 2006.

A subsidy is being paid to 340,000 poor families to improve their children's nutrition and ensure school attendance. There are now 503,000 children in the new breakfast programme for children under five; that number will double in 2005. That, together with the school cafeterias and the "Community Mothers" programme, will reach more than 6 million children under various nutrition programmes.

By December, when this Administration will have been in office for 28 months, more than 4 million poor Colombians will have enrolled in the subsidized health programme, in addition to the 13 million who were already protected. We are carrying out legal and administrative reforms to increase coverage, with improved transparency and an effective and efficient use of resources.

Colombia has more than 600,000 senior adults living in extreme poverty. In the past, 60,000 of them received a cash subsidy. This year, we have raised the number to 172,000 of our elderly compatriots. We are now starting a new programme to deliver one meal a day to 400,000 more who do not receive the cash subsidy. In addition, this year we are paying more than $100 million in subsidies to provide electricity to low-income members of the population.

We are also subsidizing more than 7,000 reintegrated former members of various violent groups. This is part of a huge, silent, but effective peace process. When one of those persons is reintegrated, he sees the support of the State and the community, reconciles himself with civic institutions, embraces democracy and coexistence and rejects any justification for violence. We hope that many more thousands will follow, but we will require international cooperation for this programme.

We are subsidizing 21,000 forest ranger families, who were formerly involved in illicit drug crops and are now committed to eliminating them and to recovering their tropical forests. Their task is essential for mankind, considering Colombia's rich biodiversity and its 578,000 square kilometres of jungle, which are threatened by illicit drugs. To guarantee their food security, we are also subsidizing 700,000 farmers, and

that number will soon reach 1 million; we are also subsidizing the crops of farmers' associations until they become productive and competitive. Poverty indicators should take account of such subsidies, which are usually not included when measuring the income of those families.

Colombia has suffered a tragedy in the form of internal displacement. We have reduced its incidence by 40 per cent, but it is still high. We have facilitated the return of more 70,000 people and we expect that number to increase. One State agency alone has multiplied eightfold its budget to care for displaced persons.

As a result of a law approved at the beginning of this Government's tenure, the process for "ownership extinction" for illegally acquired assets has moved more quickly. We expect that that mechanism will be used to advance constructive agrarian reform.

By paying additional taxes, the Colombian people are making an effort to finance security measures and restore social investment levels, for a total that represents 2 per cent of our gross domestic product. We have received the support of the multilateral banks, but we require greater understanding from the financial markets: longer-term loans and lower interest rates. We are engaged in an intense struggle, and we need better access to the markets of the industrialized countries.

I would like to reaffirm Colombia's commitment to multilateralism. Multilateralism must continuously improve if it is to become more effective and restore the lost consensus for safeguarding international peace. Building that consensus requires each State to feel that it is being heard and that it is being taken into account.

I am grateful for the support of the United Nations agencies in social matters. We are fully prepared to back the efforts of the international community to consolidate democracy and security in the region, especially in Haiti. Colombia will be part of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti. We will cooperate with police experts in the fight against drug trafficking, as well as with the humanitarian presence.

Mr. Baali (Algeria), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We must all join in an effective international solidarity movement with our Caribbean brothers, who are so seriously affected by the hurricane season.

We need the total commitment of the international community in the struggle against terrorism in Colombia. Terrorism in one country feeds and strengthens terrorist networks throughout the world. The widows and orphans of violence in our country ask why we attach so much importance to terrorism in other parts of the world, and why some attach so little to the terrorism that besets Colombia. I make this appeal from the depths of our profound democratic conviction. It is difficult to find another country facing such a challenge of terrorism while simultaneously strengthening its democracy.

Today, Colombia offer effective guarantees for the exercise of political pluralism by means of our democratic security policy. Our institutions combat terrorism with the unflinching political will of the Government. They do so with courage, selflessness and transparency. A dirty war has no place in our policies.

A democratic State has the right to ask the world to demand that the terrorists return their kidnap victims rather than clamouring for lopsided agreements with terrorists. We ask the world for more decisive and more effective support. If it is broadened, the violent groups will have no option but to abandon terrorism and to accept peace.

With the people of Colombia, its democratic institutions and the international community united, we can make Colombia an example of the capacity to defeat terrorism and observe human rights. And we can make Colombia an example of the ability to defeat terrorism and of the will to build social justice.

We will expel terror with the help of legitimate institutions and of a community of solidarity and justice, with opportunities for its poorest members.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Colombia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Álvaro Uribe Vélez, President of the Republic of Colombia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Cyril Svoboda, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic.

Mr. Svoboda (Czech Republic): Let me first congratulate Mr. Jean Ping on his election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session and wish him every success in this important position. I would also like to thank his predecessor, Mr. Julian Hunte, for his relentless efforts and leadership throughout the year.

In May, the Czech Republic became a member of the European Union (EU). For the first time, we took part in the preparation of the EU statement presented here last week by the Foreign Minister of the Netherlands, as well as in shaping the EU priorities for the current General Assembly session. It goes without saying that we fully associate ourselves with those texts.

We share the commitment of the EU to effective multilateralism, with the United Nations at its core. Indeed, the vision of a strong and truly universal United Nations is one of the fundamentals of Czech foreign policy.

Security, or the lack of it, has emerged as the most challenging problem today. International terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, State failure or organized crime — these are the threats menacing all of us.

Terrorism spares no one anywhere in the world. The brutality of the attacks and the increase in their number over the past year are frightening. It seems that the whole nature of terrorism is changing. While most earlier terrorists tried to target specific persons or institutions, with the aim of gaining the sympathy of the general public, today's terrorists are solely intent on spreading fear and terror. Their target is the general public, each one of us, and the more killed the better. What can we expect of individuals who sacrifice unlimited numbers of their own people to a perverse ideology? Their acquisition of weapons of mass destruction would result in a deadly combination.

Absolute disregard for life by these "new" terrorists has also given rise to their most dangerous tool, the ideological suicide bomber. Previously, terrorists had to devote most of their energy to planning escape routes and concealing themselves; a suicide bomber, on the other hand, needs only to concentrate on how best to hit and to destroy his target.

The diffusion of targets and the perpetrators' absolute resolve mean that terrorist threats have completely permeated our public and private spaces, each area of which has become a defence site. All this could ultimately lead to very disagreeable restrictions on certain freedoms and rights. And this takes us full circle.

If we are lax in understanding our roots and values, and if we do not have a comprehensive grasp of human rights, we could find that, in the end, we are unable to cope with the uneasy balance between security and freedom.

I do not want to speculate about cause and effect. It is not the case that a terrorist attack is a reaction, an inappropriate reaction, to something. Terrorists' ideology is aggressive and expansive, and they do not recognize terms such as "conciliation" or "coexistence". Therefore, each offer we make to negotiate, each sign of unwillingness to defend ourselves, is seen by them as further proof of our weakness and, by extension, of their "right" to assume control of declining society.

In the fight against terrorism, nobody can remain neutral. The United Nations has to pave the way for this fight at the global level. To be sure, the Counter-Terrorism Committee has done an outstanding job in overseeing the implementation of Security Council resolution 1373 (2001) and in facilitating universal acceptance of the United Nations Conventions on terrorism; but certainly more can and should be done. The true tests of our ability to cooperate are Iraq, Afghanistan and the Middle East.

Iraq continues to be of utmost concern to the international community. The full transfer of power to the Iraqi Interim Government is a historic moment for the country and an essential step on the road towards a free, prosperous and secure country. The road will, no doubt, be long and winding. Without the elimination of terrorist activities and the stabilization of the security situation, political transition and economic recovery will remain elusive.

Last summer, United Nations employees in Iraq paid the highest price for their commitment to help those in need. Now, the Organization has new tasks before it, including those connected with preparations for free elections in January 2005. However, a greater engagement of the United Nations requires a more secure environment and stronger support from the international community. The Czech Republic's contribution is focused mainly on building up Iraqi security forces and helping to finance the protection of the United Nations presence in Iraq.

Iraq, however, must not divert our attention from other major security concerns, including Afghanistan, the Middle East, Africa and the Balkans. In all these conflicts, my country seeks to play a constructive role, contributing in various ways to the related efforts of the international community. Thus, in Afghanistan, the Czech Republic is participating in the stabilization process and the rooting out of terrorism; in Africa, it is taking part in peacekeeping operations; in Kosovo, we have our largest military contingent abroad serving in the Kosovo Force and we intend to contribute troops to the new EU-led mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we believe that the role of the international community lies in providing a trusted frame of reference. It is crucial that both parties to the conflict make a sincere effort to implement their obligations in order to achieve the vision of two States living side by side in peace and security and in a peaceful and secure neighbourhood.

Last but not least, Africa has to remain on our agenda. Ten years after the genocide in Rwanda, another part of Africa is suffering from grave ethnic violence. In Darfur, people are dying every day, and in the Great Lakes region the situation is not much better. The international community must not turn away from those tragedies.

So far I have focused mainly on what we call hard threats to international security. But I do not want to create an impression that other problems plaguing the contemporary world are of lesser importance. Those more traditional problems, or soft threats, also continue to deserve our undiminished attention. There is no question of these two threats competing for our response; there is no question of forgetting one in favour of the other.

That is why the Czech Republic, as an emerging donor country, supports the strengthening of multilateral development assistance within the United Nations system, as well as close cooperation among the United Nations funds and programmes and the Bretton Woods institutions. That is why we support and strive to contribute to activities undertaken in pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development targets.

Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms remains a priority of Czech foreign policy. Together with the rest of the EU, we place special emphasis on the abolition of the death penalty, the fight against torture — in fact, just a few days ago we signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment — the protection of children in armed conflicts and, of course, respect for the activities of human rights defenders who, unfortunately, continue to face difficult conditions in a number of countries, such as Belarus, Myanmar and Cuba, among others.

Convinced that all people have equal rights and dignity, the Czech Republic is concerned about recent attempts to create a human being through cloning. We therefore concur with those calling for the swift adoption of a legally binding instrument at the universal level regulating the cloning of human beings.

Faced with the aforementioned challenges, the United Nations has to change. Of course, United Nations reform seems to be on everyone's agenda. There are, perhaps, too many reform processes going on in parallel or partially overlapping. To achieve genuine reform, however, we simply have to keep the pressure on; the United Nations must continue constantly to monitor itself and to continue its pursuit of improvement.

The Czech Republic considers itself a reform-minded country. It is an advocate of revitalization of the General Assembly, strengthening of the United Nations and reform and enlargement of the Security Council. For many years, we have been actively involved in those processes, including through the Czech presidency of the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly. We have no vested interest in these reforms except the better functioning and greater authority of the whole United Nations. The Czech Republic will continue to support inevitable reform measures, including enlargement of the Security Council in both categories of membership. In

particular, we support the aspiration of Germany and Japan to permanent seats, as well as the allocation of a further three new permanent seats for Africa, Asia and Latin America.

We greatly appreciate the reform efforts that the Secretary-General has made so far, and we expect his guidance to continue in the years to come. We eagerly await the report of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, which should place United Nations reform in a wider context of major global threats and challenges.

We are determined to play an active role in finding multilateral and United Nations-based solutions to numerous grave problems of the contemporary world. An expression of that commitment and determination is our candidature for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council in 2008-2009.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency The Honourable Samuel R. Insanally, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Guyana and former President of the General Assembly.

Mr. Insanally (Guyana): The General Assembly, this most democratic and representative of United Nations organs, has served for almost six decades now as a forum in which all States, no matter their size or status, may address with equal voice issues of interest and concern to them as well as to the international community. It has indeed become the parliament of humankind.

To the President of the General Assembly, a distinguished son of Africa, now falls the task of guiding the deliberations of this fifty-ninth session. I would like to offer him my delegation's warm congratulations and good wishes as he assumes his high responsibilities.

I would like to extend to the outgoing President, The Honourable Julian Hunte, our appreciation and thanks for his magisterial direction of the Assembly's activities over the past year. His performance is a source of pride and satisfaction, not only to his native Saint Lucia, but also to the wider Caribbean community, to which both our countries belong. Allow me also to convey to the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, our gratitude for his sure and steady leadership of the Organization during these tumultuous times.

The speakers who have preceded me in the debate have all expressed their preoccupation at the rising level of threat to global peace and security, as well as to our common economic and social security. Intense conflict in places such as Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East, Africa and Europe has destroyed thousands of innocent lives and wreaked havoc on the States involved. At the same time, despite the many promises of globalization, development continues to elude the majority of countries, especially the poorest and most vulnerable. The HIV/AIDS pandemic has not abated, continuously robbing us of precious human and financial resources. Altogether, the international scenario facing us is distressing, offering scant hope for early improvement. Like others, therefore, my delegation cannot help but state its concern at the ever-worsening international climate.

While most of our problems are man-made, many of our States, such as those in the Caribbean, must also face the constant threat of natural disasters. The recent wave of hurricanes that destroyed our sister State of Grenada and severely battered other island countries, such as Haiti, the Bahamas, Cuba, the Cayman Islands, the Dominican Republic and Jamaica, has shown how destructive the forces of nature can be to our development. The Government of Guyana extends its solidarity and support to all those afflicted, as well as to the United States of America, whose state of Florida has also been seriously struck. Such is the frequency of these phenomena that the international community must now seek to devise stronger and more responsive machinery to address their consequences. In this regard, Guyana attaches high importance to the outcome, next January, of the International Meeting to Review the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, which will be held in Mauritius, and the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, in Kobe, Japan.

The scourge of terrorism has now reached such a scale that it has been aptly described as a third world war. Scarce resources must now be diverted from development to the war on terror. Yet the rampage of destruction continues unrestrained. The process under way to stem the illicit global trade in small arms and light weapons and to forge more effective international instruments against terrorism and transnational crime commands Guyana's full support. We anxiously await the report of the United Nations High-level Panel on

Threats, Challenges and Change, in the hope that it will offer practical recommendations for preserving global peace and stability. The time may have come, we believe, to fully implement the collective security system that is envisaged in the United Nations Charter.

The age of globalization and liberalization in which we now live has undoubtedly brought with it laissez-faire attitudes and policies that have seriously affected societies everywhere. Lawlessness and violence are the new order of the day, threatening to destroy established systems of governance, especially in weak States, as demonstrated by the recent interruption of the democratic process in Haiti, the newest member of our Caribbean Community (CARICOM), which has exacerbated social conditions in that country. The Inter-American Democratic Charter and, indeed, our own Charter of Civil Society for the Caribbean Community expressly condemn such breaches of democracy. Notwithstanding our concern at these developments, Guyana stands ready to help the fraternal people of Haiti overcome their social distress. CARICOM, of which both Guyana and Haiti are members, is currently coordinating our humanitarian assistance to the island.

Respect for the fundamental tenets of the United Nations is essential if we are to avoid conflicts. The Charter is clear in its proscription of the use of force except under the particular circumstances of Chapter VII. In this context, let me say that Guyana supports the reform of the Security Council through an expansion in the membership of both the permanent and non-permanent categories and a general improvement of its modus operandi. After careful deliberation and in an attempt to break the current logjam in the discussions, my Government has decided at this stage to support the aspirations of Brazil, India and an African State to permanent membership. We believe that their participation as developing States in the work of the Council will make that body more balanced, representative and, ultimately, more accountable to the Assembly for the maintenance of global peace and security.

For Guyana, as for the rest of the international community, the situation in Iraq continues to be a source of preoccupation. We would wish to see peace and stability quickly restored to that country and its people. Similarly, we urge an end to the suicidal conflict between Israel and Palestine and a return to negotiations leading to the creation of an independent Palestine and peaceful co-existence between the two States.

As conflicts and humanitarian crises such as the one in Darfur continue to multiply, the United Nations is being called to do more with less. We therefore call for the strengthening of regional arrangements, such as those of the Organization of American States and the African Union, acting in concert with the United Nations, to assist in the search for durable solutions to conflicts and disputes.

It is also imperative that we strive with greater determination to secure our economic development and social progress. For more than six decades now, the international community has diligently sought answers to the development dilemma, moving from one facet to another, from disarmament to basic needs, from economic growth to full employment, from partnership to national ownership and from good governance to the free market. Thus far, however, the various models of development followed have failed to achieve their goals. In the continuing exploration, this year's Human Development Report has added culture to the list of crucial elements. As a small, multi-ethnic State, Guyana fully accepts this proposition and is committed to preserving the culture that has brought our nation together in service to our national development.

At the same time, we believe that cultural diversity is a contemporary reality and must be recognized by all States. Too often, strategies for peace and development ignore this reality with disastrous results. Not enough consultation and coordination are undertaken to ensure that programmes and projects are in keeping with nationally defined priorities and local circumstances. It is necessary, if failure is to be avoided, for there to be greater dialogue and cooperation in the planning process for development. National leadership remains a sine qua non for successful development and must be strongly supported by our development partners. In this spirit, Guyana renews its support for the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and other such initiatives based on strong national leadership and full international cooperation.

President Lula of Brazil and the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization are to be commended for calling this Assembly's attention to two major challenges facing the international community today, namely, poverty and

the inequities of globalization. Although we daily see on our television screens the emaciated faces of the hungry, we are yet to be stirred with the compassion and generosity of heart needed to relieve their misery. As globalization gains further ground, many more will fall victim to further marginalization, especially in small developing countries that are unable to take advantage of globalization. My own country has recently seen a devastating blow to its sugar industry, on which thousands of our people depend, as a result of trade liberalization and the reform of the European Union's sugar regime. Unless small States like ours are provided with special and differential treatment, they will be excluded from the global economy.

Next year, the world's leaders will meet to review the progress made in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). All the indications are that there is hardly enough time to achieve our objectives. We can therefore ill afford to stand still. We must determine now what ought to be done to build and sustain momentum to meet the 2015 targets. Guyana's experience has been that these are not likely to be achieved without sustained economic growth. Although we have sound poverty reduction and national development strategies in place, we know that success depends in fair measure on a fair and supportive international environment. We therefore urge that high priority be accorded to greater debt relief, the mobilization of development finance and the creation of equitable trading conditions to enable developing countries such as ours to achieve economic and social progress.

It must be realized, however, that the MDGs, although important and laudable, will not in themselves bring about comprehensive and sustainable development. They are but a subset of the development agenda, which must include, if it is to be successful, political, economic, social and environmental considerations. Without a holistic and well-coordinated approach, lasting solutions to our problems will not be found. It is for that reason that my Government continues to advocate the establishment of a new global human order based on genuine interdependence and partnership between developed and developing countries. We are at a point in time when terror, war, poverty and social chaos threaten to engulf all humanity. We therefore hope that when the relevant item comes before the Assembly next month, it will receive the further support of the international community.

Within recent years the United Nations has faced mounting criticism for its lack of responsiveness to global challenges and for its failure to be democratic in some of its decision-making. While there is often a rush to act on particular issues that are deemed important by some countries, much less attention is paid to the concerns of the vast majority. As a consequence, the credibility and even the legitimacy of the United Nations have been called into question. If that trend continues, the hard-earned prestige of the Organization will be debased and its effectiveness curtailed. There can be no worse danger to humanity than the rejection of multilateralism. We believe experience has now clearly shown that unilateralism cannot resolve the problems of our contemporary world. Only through joint endeavours can we hope to achieve the freedom from fear and the freedom from want to which all our peoples aspire.

As has been so aptly said, the United Nations may not take us to heaven but it can certainly save us from hell. Let us therefore renew our commitment to the high purposes and principles for which it stands.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Rogatien Biaou, Minister for Foreign Affairs and African Integration of the Republic of Benin.

Mr. Biaou (Benin) (*spoke in French*): Allow me first of all to address my warmest congratulations to Mr. Jean Ping on his election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session. Allow me also to pay a well-deserved tribute to Mr. Ping's eminent predecessor, Mr. Julian Hunte, whose great vitality enabled him to relaunch the discussion on the revitalization of the General Assembly and to give a new impetus towards coordination among the Organization's main bodies. Finally, I would like to express to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, the great appreciation of the people and Government of Benin for his work as head of our Organization; we commend him for his courage, his skill and his vision of world affairs.

People from every corner of the planet are placing great hope in our work over the course of this session to give hope and life to their legitimate aspirations. That can only be achieved if we all work

together, with conviction and determination, to consolidate our commitment to multilateralism.

Yes, in order to survive, our world, more than ever before, needs multilateral cooperation based on the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. Yes, more than ever before the principles of the Charter must be implemented with an acute sense of responsibility and a clear understanding of their purpose, which is to promote international peace and security and economic and social development as essential prerequisites for the promotion and protection of human dignity.

Yes, it is now on the basis of human dignity that we are to measure the validity and accuracy of any national or international policy. We therefore urge every Member of the United Nations to examine their consciences and to make changes accordingly, so that we can give that approach its fullest meaning. It is on this issue that the challenges are the greatest, as can be seen by the blind abuse and violence that is carried out on a massive scale by terrorists and armed groups against innocent civilians.

With respect to armed conflicts and their consequences, we must redouble our past efforts to enhance our ability to act preventively, doing all we can to quickly and effectively defuse potential sources of conflicts and neutralize the seeds of conflict situations before they germinate. As we have no other choice but to cure — since we have been unable to prevent — we have to considerably increase United Nations capabilities in the areas of peacekeeping and management of post-conflict situations.

We would like to reiterate our deep gratitude to the Secretary-General for his personal commitment in seeking a rapid solution to the Ivorian crisis within the framework of the Accra III accords. The international community — despite the erratic evolution of the situation — must stay the course with Côte d'Ivoire in its efforts to respect its commitments and to ensure a smooth transition towards the restoration of peace, by stabilizing the situation so that that country can find its place within the development dynamic in the West African subregion.

We also encourage the international community to focus particular attention on the Great Lakes region, which remains a source of concern. The situation there also requires a regional approach — one that can be best effected by holding the proposed international conference on the Great Lakes region.

We reiterate our firm support for the Secretary-General's recommendations to substantially reinforce the troops of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in order to help consolidate the peace process in that country.

The situation in Darfur has highlighted the urgent need to realize programmes to establish an independent operations management unit for peacekeeping within the African Union in order to facilitate the rapid deployment of African forces to stem conflicts as soon as they break out.

Conflict prevention can only be effective if we take into consideration the disturbing question of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, which is a dangerous destabilizing factor. The illicit circulation of small arms and light weapons considerably reduces the ability of national communities to peacefully resolve their disputes.

The same applies to disarmament, which Benin considers crucial to the establishment of peace and the promotion of development. We call for the total and verifiable elimination from our planet of the threat of nuclear arms, as well as other types of weapons of mass destruction.

Since 11 September 2001 international terrorism has become one of the great challenges of our time. The international community must condemn terrorism and combat it in all its forms with determination — attacking the problem with a renewed political will to seek a lasting solution to the serious international problems that terrorism feeds on. We must, however, remember that in prosecuting that struggle it is imperative that we preserve the democratic freedoms that have been so dearly won by our citizens, and the open society, which is the essence of democracy.

Indeed, terrorism is not the monopoly of a single religion or nationality, much less that of a given civilization. It is not the concern of one particular category of countries. It is a global threat and, as a result, requires a global response. My country is sparing no effort to join the efforts of the international community in that area. It is in that spirit that we signed and carried out the ratification of 12 international conventions regarding the fight against terrorism and organized crime.

We have all acknowledged the need for reform, and for more than a decade have been involved in a multidimensional discussion in order to bring the institutional architecture of the United Nations system and its operating methods up to date in accordance with the changing realities the elements of the system were devised to confront.

The ultimate goal of reform is to better serve the ideals of the Organization and better meet the legitimate expectations of the people of the world in the face of the dangers confronting them today.

With respect to Security Council reform, most Member States have expressed the hope that the Security Council will become more representative of the international community as a whole, in the light of the considerable increase in the number of Member States — which have grown from 51 to 192 since the creation of the United Nations — and in the light of the fact that the new States have a certain weight demographically, economically and militarily.

I take this opportunity to extend my thanks to all Member States of the United Nations that, on 23 October 2003, voted for my country, Benin, to become a non-permanent member of the Security Council for the period 2004-2005.

In the context of current discussions on Security Council reform, Benin believes that any reform of the Council must take into consideration the legitimate aspirations of the developing countries, in particular African countries, while maintaining the Council's effectiveness and good functioning.

Benin has no objection to the friendly countries of Japan, Germany and Brazil becoming permanent members of the Security Council. However, the extent, the nature and the modalities of the increase in Council membership should be based on the principles of equitable geographic distribution and the sovereign equality of States. Clearly, there cannot be a partial or selective increase in the number of permanent and non-permanent members of the Council that works to the detriment of the developing countries. In that context, Africa, like all regional groups, must have two permanent seats on the Security Council. Any other solution would cause a de facto disequilibrium and an overrepresentation of one regional group to the detriment of others. In other words, Africa justly demands two permanent seats and two non-permanent seats, in addition to the three it currently holds.

The right of veto should be extended to the new permanent members of the Security Council. In addition, the non-permanent members of the Council, in rotation, could be accorded the veto power during the month they hold the presidency, given the importance of that position.

The link between development and peace can be seen more clearly now than in the past. We are used to hearing those two concepts linked in the time-honoured saying that "development is the other name for peace". As national revenue grows, Governments have greater manoeuvring room to adopt social and economic policies that promote national integration and regional equilibrium.

Today, two years after the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held at Johannesburg, we all agree on the importance of the progressive and harmonious attainment of the goals of sustainable development, in accordance with the outcome of our work at Johannesburg. If the environment is important, in no way can it be treated separately from other aspects of sustainable development. Rather, it is by reinforcing national development capacity, while supporting the activities of communities through high-impact programmes such as microfinancing, as proposed by the United Nations Development Programme and the Global Environment Facility, that we can wage a radical campaign against extreme poverty and reduce the number of people living in poverty by 2015, as established in the Millennium Development Goals.

Those programmes provide opportunities to help us better protect natural resources. However, we will not allow the protection of the environment to become a limit to our country's economic growth. Sustainable development, properly understood, consists of integrating all dimensions into a coherent national policy.

In developing countries, in particular the least developed countries and especially Benin, where many efforts have been made to reinforce democracy, strengthen the decentralization process and fight poverty, communities and non-governmental organizations must be strengthened to decentralize management of the environment and thus promote development at the local level.

Also to fight poverty and better manage natural resources, we must remember that the Johannesburg

Summit identified the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification as one way to fight poverty and as a tool available to the international community to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. When, at its sixtieth session, the General Assembly examines the progress made towards achieving those Goals, my delegation hopes that the Convention to Combat Desertification will take its rightful place in the discussions on the Millennium Project, led by Professor Jeffrey Sachs.

With respect to financial resources, we call on the international community to make the fourth replenishment of the Global Environment Fund even greater than the third and call for the issue of soil degradation and desertification to receive all the attention it deserves.

By adopting the 2001 Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the decade 2001-2010 at the conclusion of the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, held in Brussels, the international community established the key goal of doing everything possible to halve by 2015 the number of people living in extreme poverty and suffering hunger and to promote sustainable development in the developing countries.

In spite of the efforts made, the least developed countries continue to suffer from the burden of debt, leading to weakened measures for social protection, the impoverishment of vulnerable segments of society, rural migration and the depreciation of agricultural products, among other things.

In his mandate as Global Chair of the Bureau of the Least Developed Countries, President Mathieu Kérékou of the Republic of Benin took part from 28 to 30 June 2004 in the 2004 high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council's substantive session, devoted to mobilizing resources and promoting an environment favourable to eliminating poverty, in the context of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the decade 2001-2010. The high-level segment identified real ways to mobilize external and internal resources to eliminate poverty through microfinancing, the promotion of small and medium-sized business and land tenure security.

The least developed countries, in particular those of Africa, must strive to strengthen partnerships with the international community, given that the prospects of their national economies raise the most doubts.

This year, Benin has again made its modest contribution to international efforts by convening an African Union regional conference on the family, in the framework of the tenth anniversary of the United Nations International Year of the Family.

At that conference, Africa established an action plan on the African family, as well as strategies for its implementation. The action plan is based on the observation that Africa is undergoing three great transformations and is faced with enormous challenges that place increased pressure on families. In order to meet those challenges, we must adopt an integrated approach that places families at the centre of a comprehensive development programme to preserve the integrity of families.

African countries share the conviction that implementation of the nine priority areas of that action plan will make it possible to achieve the Millennium Development Goals in the shortest possible time. The action plan has been issued as a United Nations document. We urge our development partners to give it all the necessary attention in order to pool resources to implement the plan, which can be considered a supplementary effort to better focus on human beings within their basic social milieu and according to their principal needs, with a view to attaining the Millennium Development Goals.

Encouraging efforts have been made in the areas of official development assistance, managing the foreign debt of heavily indebted countries and multinational trade negotiations — in particular those undertaken in the context of the New Partnership for Africa's Development. They must be coherently pursued in order to achieve an overall improvement in the foreign environment for developing countries, in general, and for African countries, in particular.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the extension of the expiration date of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative, as well as for the adoption of the general Framework for Establishing Modalities in Agriculture for multilateral trade negotiations under the Doha Work Programme, which is known as the July package. The general framework of negotiations on that document was based on the agreement of developed countries to bring domestic subsidies for their farmers to a level

that permits farmers in the least developed countries to live off the fruits of their labours.

In that regard, I would like to emphasize that, as far as the sectoral Cotton Initiative is concerned — which should be the subject of separate and special treatment within a subcommittee — the development strategy for the cotton sector could encompass identifying market opportunities, the possibility of developing high-added-value activities and the establishment of bodies or mechanisms that make it possible to regulate and strengthen the market.

I would like to conclude my statement by reminding the Assembly that Benin will assume the presidency of the Security Council in February 2005. As part of its presidency, we plan to organize a ministerial conference in New York on the theme "Thinking about the future situation of child soldiers in Africa". One of the objectives envisaged for that debate will be to help find lasting solutions to the problem of child soldiers in Africa and to begin the process of developing an international legal instrument to prevent the recruitment of children into armies. Through that theme, we will hope to engage the international community in a genuine alliance to promote peace, security, political stability and development in Africa. We count on the support and participation of members of the Assembly in that conference, which will make it possible for us to defuse the time bomb represented by the issue of child soldiers. I therefore invite all members to make a contribution in order to bequeath a brighter tomorrow to future generations.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency U Tin Winn, Minister, Office of the Prime Minister of the Union of Myanmar.

U Tin Winn (Myanmar): Allow me, first of all, to congratulate the President on his assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session. I am fully confident that his wisdom and diplomatic skills will guide our deliberations to a fruitful outcome. I would also like to take this opportunity to convey my appreciation to Mr. Julian Hunte for his able leadership and contributions to the success of the previous session. My delegation would also like to pay tribute to the Secretary-General for his selfless dedication to the cause of the United Nations.

The world today faces many daunting challenges. Most ominous and threatening among them are issues related to peace and security. Under those circumstances, it is worth recalling the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, which were enunciated 50 years ago by Myanmar, along with China and India, to provide the basic principles for inter-State relations. The Principles were subsequently adopted by Asian and African leaders in the Bandung Declaration of 1955. The 1961 Belgrade Conference of the Non-Aligned Movement also adopted the Principles as basic tenets of the Movement. The United Nations itself endorsed the Principles. Founded on the premise of the essential unity of humankind, the Five Principles remain as relevant and valid today as on the day they were proclaimed.

Myanmar considers the United Nations, which represents international legitimacy and near-universal membership, as the sole multilateral forum for addressing urgent global issues. Recent events remind us of the futility of unilateralism and the danger of resorting to the use of force without the authorization of the United Nations.

Threats to the international system and the rapidly evolving international situation demand a thorough reform of the Organization and its mechanisms, structure and working methods. In that context, we would like to reiterate our views on the reform of the Organization, including that of the Security Council. The expansion and reform of the Security Council must be an integral part of a common package. If it is to become more representative and reflect contemporary political and economic realities, the Council should be expanded in both categories of membership. An ideal solution in the democratization process would be the abolition of the veto. Until that is done, its application should be limited. It is also our view that new permanent members of the Security Council should enjoy the same rights and privileges as current members.

Myanmar notes with interest the ongoing work of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change.

In this highly globalized world, regional cooperation, including South-South cooperation, can well complement international cooperation. As a member of the Association of South-East Asian Nations, Myanmar is actively involved in the Association's activities aimed at promoting regional

peace, stability and prosperity and at enhancing cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region.

Terrorism is one of the most serious challenges that the world faces today. It threatens national sovereignty and violates human rights, including the right to life. Last year, terrorists carried their war to the doorstep of the United Nations. They cruelly extinguished the lives of 22 innocent persons, including that of Special Representative Sergio Vieira de Mello, at United Nations headquarters in Baghdad. More recently, we have seen wanton acts of terrorism in diverse parts of the world, from Beslan to Jakarta to Madrid. Myanmar unequivocally condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and joins the international community in calling for concerted action to combat the menace in accordance with the United Nations Charter and international law.

We have never permitted the use of our territory for hostile acts against any State. We have neither provided assistance to those involved in terrorist acts nor safe haven to them, and we never will.

Myanmar is doing its utmost to combat this menace at the national, regional and international levels. Myanmar has signed, or acceded to, 11 of the 12 international legal instruments related to the suppression of terrorism. It is also actively involved in the Bali Process to combat transnational crime, including international terrorism.

The illicit trafficking in drugs is another challenge that is closely linked to other transnational crimes. Success in the war against drugs will contribute to a successful outcome in the fight against transnational crime. Myanmar accords topmost priority to the suppression and eradication of narcotic drugs. A 15-year national plan is targeted at the eradication of narcotic drugs in the country by the year 2014. In the last decade, Myanmar seized and destroyed drugs valued at more than $14.5 billion.

Figures from the United States Drug Enforcement Administration show that over a span of eight years, from 1996 to 2003, poppy cultivation declined steadily, by 71 per cent, while opium production decreased by 81 per cent. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has acknowledged Myanmar's commitment to the anti-drug campaign.

In recent years the problem of synthetic drugs has also surfaced. The illicit drugs chain begins with inadequate control of the trade in precursor chemicals. It bears repetition that my country does not produce precursor chemicals used in the production of narcotic drugs. We would like to urge countries that produce precursor chemicals to institute effective regulatory controls. Without precursor chemicals there can be no amphetamine-type synthetic drugs.

Myanmar is determined in its fight against drugs. It has established bilateral, trilateral, regional and multilateral cooperation to rid the world of this scourge.

Some Western countries allege that Myanmar is not adequately addressing the issue of trafficking in persons. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, Myanmar views trafficking in persons as an evil that must be suppressed through concerted action. In that connection, Myanmar acceded to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime on 30 March of this year. A national law against human trafficking is being drafted in accordance with that Convention. Next month, Myanmar will host the meeting of the six-nation Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking.

Allegations of human rights violations in Myanmar are aimed at discrediting the Government for political purposes. Myanmar believes that the question of human rights is an important issue. It should be addressed with objectivity and impartiality, and without selectivity. Myanmar has consistently cooperated with the United Nations on human rights issues. In that context, a national Human Rights Committee has already been established and human rights awareness is being introduced in school curricula nationwide, as well as through workshops.

An interview conducted by a politically motivated non-governmental organization with 25 or so insurgents inside a neighbouring country became the basis of a report that there are 70,000 child soldiers in the Myanmar national armed forces. That is a far-fetched conclusion. The falsehood found its way into the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in 2002 (S/2002/1299). The report subsequently became the resource document in the Security Council's ensuing thematic debate on children and armed conflict.

I wish, first of all, to firmly reiterate that Myanmar is not a nation in armed conflict. It is a nation at peace. Secondly, I wish to clearly state that

children not permitted to be recruited into the armed services in Myanmar, either by law or in practice. A preventive programme was in place in my country even before Security Council resolutions were adopted on this theme. In that regard, the Chairman of our Committee on the Prevention of the Recruitment of Child Soldiers recently received the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) representative in Myanmar to explore ways and means to enhance cooperation. The representative was afforded the opportunity to visit the army recruitment centre near Yangon, and subsequently the army recruitment centre in Mandalay together with the United Nations Resident Coordinator. Myanmar is finalizing an action plan and is cooperating with UNICEF in that regard. It will also continue its cooperation with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

Allow me to turn to developments in my country. Peace and stability have been restored. We are taking steps to ensure a smooth transition to a peaceful, democratic modern State. Myanmar places the highest priority on national reconciliation to achieve unity among its 135 national races. In order to strengthen ties and promote the economic and social development of the national races inhabiting the border areas, the Government has expended 58 billion kyats and more than $550 million in infrastructure development that includes communication networks and education and health facilities, thus promoting the quality of life of those citizens.

Notwithstanding the unilateral sanctions of some Western countries, Myanmar has been able to develop its economy and promote the well-being of its people. We have achieved this by relying mainly on our own resources, and with the assistance and cooperation of our neighbours.

Noteworthy advances have been made in the health and education sectors. The country now has 757 hospitals, with 140 hospitals having been added in the last 15 years. In the past year alone, 22 new hospitals were commissioned. Over the same period, the number of colleges and universities in the country has increased from 32 to 154. Enrolment has risen dramatically in those institutions, from 120,000 to 890,000 students.

The President returned to the Chair.

Allow me now to turn to recent political developments in my country. In August 2003, the Prime Minister, General Khin Nyunt, announced a seven-step road map for transition to democracy. The road map has been well received in the country, as well as by our neighbours. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit last November welcomed the commitment of the Myanmar Government to effect a transition to democracy.

The first and most crucial step of the road map, the reconvening of the National Convention, was taken on 17 May of this year. The current Convention is being attended by 1,088 delegates from eight strata, representing all walks of life. It is more inclusive than the previous Convention, which was attended by only about 700 delegates.

Moreover, 60 per cent of the delegates to the current Convention are from the national races. Over 100 delegates represent 17 major armed groups and 17 smaller armed groups, which have returned to the legal fold. In the previous Convention, representatives of three or four armed groups which had just returned to the legal fold were present as observers.

During the first session, the sensitive issue of power-sharing between the central Government and the states and regions was the main focus of discussion. Indeed, power-sharing is a vital and delicate issue, as the country is now evolving from a unitary Government structure to a union structure, where states and regions will have their own executive and legislative bodies. Delegates held extensive discussions on that issue. Because of the complex and sensitive nature of the deliberations, discussions were time-consuming and sometimes intense. After a successful first session, the Convention adjourned on 9 July.

Myanmar is a union of 135 national races, and unity is key to achieving our vision of a prosperous democratic State. We are greatly encouraged by the results of the first session. The common desire to ensure the success of the seven-step road map was evident. Preparations are under way for the second session, which is to be convened in the forthcoming open season. Once agreement is reached on the fundamental principles in the National Convention, a new constitution will be drafted. The draft text will be put to a referendum for the people of Myanmar to decide upon. After the adoption of the new

constitution, there will be free and fair elections, in which the people will elect leaders of their choice.

The new political structure needs to be strong and resilient, and the country united. The future of the nation cannot be determined by one individual or one party acting alone. There is no alternative to the National Convention. It is the sole process through which the aspirations of the people of Myanmar to establish a modern and democratic nation can be fulfilled. We cannot allow the National Convention to be derailed under any circumstances. Failure would plunge the nation into the abyss of anarchy. That is the reason why we set such store on the successful outcome of the National Convention. We are determined that this vital national endeavour will be crowned with success.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Sergei N. Martynov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus.

Mr. Martynov (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): For decades now we have been hearing very disturbing questions from this rostrum: Where is our world heading?, Where is the United Nations going? At the dawn of the millennium those questions are becoming increasingly burning issues. The world has changed. The pendulum of history has swung to the other side. There is new violence, a wave of terrorism, local wars and ethnic conflicts, behind which lie growing poverty and a widening gap in development between countries. Those are not just someone else's problems; they are common global challenges for all of us. What kind of common house do we want? I believe that we primarily want a safe house, where our children will not die at the hands of terrorists or from hunger, sickness, anti-personnel mines, smart bombs or missiles.

What, then, must we do? The answer is clear: we must establish a valid system of international security that includes military, economic, environmental, social and information elements — a system based on the rule of law in domestic and international affairs. The answer is clear, but it is difficult to do it. During the Assembly's last session, Belarus made the rule of law in international relations the main focus of its statement. The fact that that theme has been a leitmotif of the present general debate inspires a certain hope in us, namely, that the goal is a realistic one.

No right-thinking person can remain indifferent today to the heinous acts of terrorism that have characterized the start of the twenty-first century. The usual approaches, based on selfishness and unilateral advantage, are not enough to crush this evil. We need non-traditional, long-term, comprehensive solutions. Who can provide them, and how? Only the United Nations, by playing its crucial role, can do so. The Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC) must become a real, practical tool for curbing the growth in international terrorism: strengthening the anti-terrorism coalition under the auspices of the United Nations, monitoring the implementation of the provisions of Security Council resolution 1373 (2001) and putting an end to the practice of double standards vis-à-vis terrorists and terrorism.

In practical terms, establishing a direct link between the CTC and regional organizations and holding more open Security Council meetings at the ministerial level could really help in the global struggle against terrorism, under the banner of the United Nations. However, such a struggle can be successful only if our common goal is to strengthen a just and humane world system. Belarus will do its utmost in that struggle.

On 1 March 2004, the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction entered into force in Belarus. We have the world's seventh largest stockpile of landmines, which we inherited from the former Soviet Union. We do not produce or export mines; nor do we use them at home or anywhere else in the world. However, guided by our common concerns and interests, we ratified the Ottawa Convention and are now counting on assistance from the international community to destroy our stockpile of mines.

Tomorrow we will deposit my country's instruments of ratification for such important international disarmament agreements as the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism and the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

Today's most important challenges include illegal migration, transborder crime, drug trafficking, trafficking in persons and the security of energy infrastructure. In combating those threats, Belarus,

which stands at a major European crossroads, is a significant factor in the stability of Europe. Our country is also playing a major role in the Europe-Asia transport of energy resources. Today we call on our neighbours, NATO and the European Union to organize regional cooperation to ensure the security of critical infrastructure, such as oil and gas pipelines and power stations, including nuclear ones. Belarus has already announced its readiness to dedicate troops and resources to international structures in support of those goals. The contribution of Belarus to regional and international security, which began in the areas of nuclear and conventional disarmament in the early 1990s, continues to be a real and significant one. We are grateful to other countries and to international organizations for their assistance in the area of border and customs infrastructure.

Double standards are becoming an increasingly important problem, and not only vis-à-vis terrorism. That objectionable instrument is being used primarily against States that are bold enough to follow their own foreign policy, rather than submitting to the dictates of the world's power centres. A leader is not a dictator, and certainly not a messiah. The practice of double standards today applies primarily to the Euro-Atlantic space. But strenuous efforts are being made to introduce it in the United Nations. That would present a danger to the stability and effectiveness of the United Nations system. Belarus calls on all States that are not indifferent to the independence of the United Nations and to the role it plays not to allow that to happen.

Economic security is a very important condition for sustainable development. That is a very remote concept for most of the countries of the world. As the only European State that is a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, Belarus would like to stress that the concept of centre versus periphery pits developed countries against developing countries in the industrial arena. It is also a concept that is clearly in crisis, and one that will slow us down in the search for a solution to problems of economic development.

Only seven of the 50 least developed countries have achieved a 7 per cent growth rate, which is prerequisite to halving the number of people living in absolute poverty by the year 2015. One person dies of hunger every four seconds. That is just a figure, but the very banality of that statement does reveal the monstrosity of the problem and how terrible is the world's indifference to it. The difficulty of the undertaking should not stop us from seeking ways to resolve the problem of poverty. That is why Belarus supports President Lula da Silva's initiative to fight hunger and poverty in the world.

Despite the transitional period and the collapse of our economy, my country — a large area of the former Soviet Union — was the first to solve the problem of malnutrition. Now, we are waging a struggle against poverty. Since 1995, we have almost halved the number of people living in poverty in Belarus, with the figure this year being about 20 per cent.

The difficulties we have experienced have not stopped us from providing economic assistance to developing countries. We have unilaterally extended trade preferences to the overwhelming majority of developing countries.

We are disturbed by a possible lessening of United Nations attention to issues involving countries with economies in transition. Belarus regards the role of United Nations programmes and funds as important to the development assistance provided to countries with economies in transition. However, under current conditions — in which some States of the region are approaching the level of the Group of Eight (G-8) and others have macroeconomic indicators that barely exceed those of least developed countries — that assistance must be carefully targeted. That means that, in planning country programmes, account must be taken of countries' socio-economic development and the degree of their integration into the world economy and financial institutions. We intend to make that approach the basis of a draft General Assembly resolution, and we hope that members will support it.

The problems associated with financing for development are extremely topical today for developing countries and countries with economies in transition. Last year's two-day High-Level Dialogue on Financing for Development was not enough to put in place ongoing monitoring of the implementation of the decisions of the International Conference on Financing for Development. That will require an independent body of the Economic and Social Council.

Belarus believes that the 2005 New York summit on the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals will provide real impetus to all initiatives aimed at stimulating economic development.

Narrowing the technological and information divide between developed and developing countries must be our common concern.

At the 2003 Geneva World Summit on the Information Society, the President of the Republic of Belarus, Mr. Alyaksandr Lukashenka, strongly urged the establishment of a trust fund to offset losses incurred by producers who provide software to developing countries at reduced costs. The format and mechanism for such a fund should be defined by a task force within the context of preparing for the 2005 summit.

Having experienced the Chernobyl disaster, Belarus is acutely aware of one fact: we cannot disregard the problem of radiation security. The consequences are too enormous in scope, and too incompatible with the long-term survival of the human race. The United Nations must not lessen its attention to the problem of overcoming the consequences of the Chernobyl accident. We support the work of the International Atomic Energy Agency to implement a nuclear non-proliferation regime and to strengthen nuclear and radiation security.

Looking to the future to seek ways to ensure normal living conditions for people living in areas affected by the Chernobyl disaster: that will be the theme of an international conference to be held in Minsk in 2006, on the sad anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster. We invite all interested States, the leadership of the Secretariat and international organizations to participate in the preparations for the conference and in the event itself.

The United Nations has often been criticized. There have been many pessimistic analyses of its work and its potential. A great deal of that has been fair, but let us look the truth straight in the eyes: there is no alternative to the United Nations as a mechanism for collectively resolving global and regional issues. Nor is there an alternative to multilateralism. The reality of life convinces us of that more and more each day.

Belarus looks forward with great interest to the outcome of the work of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change. As a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, Belarus urges the Panel to take account of the consolidated position of the countries members of the Non-Aligned Movement as it works on its proposals to enhance the effectiveness of United Nations reform.

A key purpose of that work must be to correct the imbalance in the membership of the Security Council and in the Organization as a whole, as well as to promote respect for the principle of equitable geographical distribution of Council seats. We believe there should be an increase in the category of non-permanent members, taking account of the interests of all the regional groups. We also believe in increasing the number of permanent members, including representatives from the three developing regions — Asia, Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean — as well as from two developed States, from Europe and Asia respectively, that have made the most tangible contributions to the maintenance of international peace and security.

Let me return to the disturbing questions I posed at the beginning of my statement. Where is the world heading? Where is the United Nations going? The answer to the first question must be that it depends upon the United Nations. That is the main point. So far, however, that has not been reflected in the world situation. That is a harsh truth, but the truth nonetheless. We must change that situation. We can do so. It is in our common interest and in the interest of small and large States alike, as well as of both rich and developing countries. It is in the interest of the United Nations.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Vartan Oskanian, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia.

Mr. Oskanian (Armenia): We wish to extend our congratulations to you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly. We would also like to thank to Mr. Julian Hunte and the Secretary-General for their efforts during this difficult year.

Last year, we expressed our concern about the restoration of sovereignty in Iraq and the reinvigoration of the Middle East peace process. This year, we wish especially to note the critical need to end the tragedy in Darfur. Armenians, victims of the twentieth century's first genocide, know well the long-lasting effects of victimization and homelessness. This is no way to begin a new millennium. The benefits of globalization should be utilized to overcome this newest global crisis.

We also comprehend all too well that peace and security abroad and at home are clearly associated with

social and economic dignity today — or with faith in their possible attainment tomorrow. Neither self-satisfied smugness on the one hand nor self-righteous violence on the other are solutions to the great inequalities that exist around the world and within each of our countries, even the most developed of them.

Terrorism, in all its manifestations, affects security and political and economic stability in our neighbourhoods and throughout our planet. Terrorism, from Madrid to Beslan, in all its manifestations, is inexcusable and unacceptable. Cognizant that the success of counter-terrorism efforts is dependent upon collective measures, Armenia has readily joined the global fight against international terrorism. That fight must go beyond effective regional and international cooperation. It must include the very goals of the Millennium Declaration: replacing deprivation, poverty and injustice with universal respect for human rights and democracy, economic development, equality and social justice.

In Armenia we have had a year in which economic growth went hand in hand with increased participation in international organizations, particularly in the United Nations. Our position in the Human Development Index gives us the confidence to continue on our path of economic development. We will also work hard to bolster public-private partnerships. We are proud that Armenia's major enterprises are finding ways to contribute to art and culture, to invest in public life and to become partners in our society's pursuit of happiness and quality of life.

In 2005, the international community will review the progress that has been made in the implementation of the global development agenda. It would be most useful if we could focus our resources on the implementation of the agenda rather than on restating our collective good intentions. In other words, we must find the political will to make the political and financial commitments necessary to overcome the outstanding obstacles.

The Millennium Development Goals are guidelines for Armenia. To that end, the empowerment of women, the protection of children and the fight against poverty are not just goals for us: they are building blocks for a prosperous, healthy and stable society. The Government of Armenia has approved national action plans on the protection of the rights of the child, on improving the status of women and enhancing their role in our society and on preventing trafficking in persons. In addition, a broad anti-corruption strategy, developed with the participation and counsel of the international community, will complement the poverty reduction strategy programme that is already beginning to yield results.

We are continuing our effective collaboration with United Nations bodies on a number of important issues, including use of information and communication technologies to improve governance and institutionalize public/private interactions. With donor community support, focused institution-building and good governance, we expect that the human rights and democratic reforms of the past decade will go beyond the solid legislative framework that has already been developed and will take root — psychologically and socially — in our society.

Armenia, as an active member of the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Human Rights, will remain involved in international development cooperation. At the same time, we will participate in the effort to improve the consultation and coordination mechanisms that are essential for the effectiveness of the collective security system and we look forward to the assessment of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change.

We stand for broader cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations to ensure the broader involvement and commitment of countries in decision-making and implementation processes. Reform is necessary within those valued organizations if we are to effectively address today's realities and challenges and resolve tomorrow's problems. To do that, we cannot work with yesterday's mechanisms. A revitalized General Assembly is indispensable for effective United Nations action. We would also support Japan, Germany and India joining countries from Africa and Latin America as permanent members of an enlarged and more representative Security Council.

In a few short years, Armenia has done away with the false proposition that we must choose between East and West, between the old world and the new. We have done away with the myth that our neighbours can control the pace of our economic development and shape its direction. Now we want to do away with the very dangerous notion that yesterday's adversaries are enemies forever.

Armenia is ready to compromise and collaborate with neighbours who are ready to join us in making history, not rewriting it. We want to work with an Azerbaijan that understands its place in a rule-based international order, not one whose policies, practices and statements threaten the fragile peace and stability of our region.

Azerbaijan was the first to introduce ethnic cleansing in the Soviet space, the first to engage mercenaries and international terrorists in its own defence and the first to discard the "rules of engagement" in international organizations.

Let me explain. The Armenian presence in the region of the Caucasus has been long and extensive. Indeed, denying or rewriting that history requires systematic planning, energy and resources. Unfortunately, the Government of Azerbaijan has not spared those resources. Azerbaijan succeeded in eliminating the Armenians of Nakhichevan, who comprised more than half the population there. There were more than 400,000 Armenians living in Azerbaijan during the Soviet period. The pogroms of Sumgait and Baku led to the fact that there are none today. Indeed, the Azerbaijani experiment in ethnic cleansing worked.

A decade ago, Azerbaijan retained the services of mercenaries and international terrorists — the same names we hear today — to fight against the Armenian men and women who were defending their own lands and homes against aerial bombings and proximate shelling. The terrorists lost, Armenians won.

Finally, Azerbaijan's leadership dismisses the opportunities offered by membership in international organizations to build bridges and seek solutions. Today, Azerbaijan rejects mediation by those who wish to help halt drug trafficking through its territory. It dismisses efforts by the Council of Europe and other monitoring groups to come to the region and see with their own eyes, at first hand, the destruction of thousands of irreplaceable historic and cultural markers. Azerbaijan squawks about its desire for NATO membership, even as it repeatedly prohibits a partner's participation in NATO exercises. Worse, Azerbaijan not only does not rebuke, it champions the Azerbaijani military officer who decapitated a fellow Armenian officer in a NATO training course in Budapest. It maligns the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to hide its own refusal to consider the proposals that have grown from the discussions and negotiations in which its own leadership has participated. For more than half a decade, Azerbaijan has rejected every proposal before it from the "common State" proposal in 1998 to the Key West document of 2001.

Armenians prevailed in the military confrontation unleashed by Azerbaijan in response to the peaceful demands of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh for self-determination. Contrary to the assertion made by Azerbaijan's President from this podium, Armenians have occupied those lands for over 2,000 years, and not just the last 10. Today, Nagorno-Karabakh has reversed the injustice done by Stalin back in the mid-1920s. It is free, democratic and tolerant of minorities. Nagorno-Karabakh holds regular elections, has State and security structures, completely controls its own territory and has a growing economy.

If in the past century Armenians and Azerbaijanis were forcibly linked together, in the present century — in which we have won the right to our own destinies — we can determine to live together peaceably. If we are serious about becoming full, deserving residents of the European neighbourhood — where borders do not count, but intentions and tolerance do — we will have to come to terms with our past, with our history and with the realities that have gripped our region.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Momodu Koroma, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Sierra Leone.

Mr. Koroma (Sierra Leone): I would like to join others in congratulating you, Mr. President, on your election to direct the affairs of the General Assembly — this great parliament of nations — at its fifty-ninth session. Let me also take this opportunity to pay tribute to your predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Julian Hunte, especially for the momentum he gave to the ongoing process of the revitalization of the General Assembly.

Once again, in his annual report on the work of the Organization and in his forthright statement to the Assembly last week, the Secretary-General set the tone of the annual general debate. My delegation commends him for his tenacity and courage under extreme political circumstances and shares his overall assessment of the current international situation and the role of the United Nations.

Just a little more than three weeks ago, on the initiative of the member States of the Non-Aligned Movement, the Assembly reaffirmed the central role of the United Nations in the maintenance of international peace and security and the promotion of international cooperation. It was, indeed, a reaffirmation that this Organization was founded on international cooperation and that its efficacy is rooted in international cooperation. My delegation therefore urges all Member States to adhere to the principle of cooperation.

Sierra Leone believes, and will continue to believe in the United Nations. After all, we are part of the United Nations, like each and every State represented in the General Assembly. Of course there are some difficulties, but we strongly believe that, given adequate resources and cooperative support in a timely manner and given the necessary moral and political support, the United Nations can deliver, as it has done admirably in Sierra Leone.

In that connection, allow me to express our sincere appreciation to all the countries that have contributed to the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL). Our thanks also go out to the staff of all the agencies and programmes of the United Nations family and the non-governmental organizations that have worked in partnership with the United Nations, the Government and civil society to restore peace and stability in our country and, most recently, to conduct local government elections.

A theme that has reverberated within the Hall in the past week, and in other international forums, is the observance of the rule of law. The Secretary-General's analysis of its significance needs no embellishment. The causes and character of the conflict in Sierra Leone, perhaps more than in any other country in the world in recent times, tell us that nearly everything crumbles when the rule of law collapses and that, therefore, it should be made the pillar of post-conflict reconstruction, national recovery, governance and administration of justice and the cornerstone of lasting peace.

While the Government of Sierra Leone is struggling, albeit with limited resources, to reform its own administration of justice, it is also concerned about the financial situation of the Special Court, established in the country to address impunity. The efficacy, and indeed the credibility of the Court, could be questioned unless urgent measures are taken to address its budgetary problems. I should therefore like to take this opportunity to appeal for continued voluntary contributions, as well as the requested subventions from the regular budget of the United Nations for the Special Court.

As President Kabbah said at the formal opening of the courthouse last March, it is

> "a Special Court for Sierra Leone, a symbol of the rule of law and an essential element in the pursuit of peace, justice and national reconciliation for the people of Sierra Leone. It is also a Special Court for the international community, a symbol of the rule of international law."

There is no guarantee that the victims of violations of international humanitarian and human rights law during the civil war in Sierra Leone will receive reparation for those heinous crimes. So the least we can do for them now is to ensure that justice is done. We can do so by reducing the financial burden of the Special Court and by demonstrating that we are indeed serious about respect for the rule of law.

The United Nations was formed over 50 years ago as a response to the peace and security needs of the era of its birth. Since then, the world has experienced, and continues to experience, fundamental changes, to which the United Nations should adapt. That is why Sierra Leoneans continue to follow with profound interest the consultative processes for the revitalization of the General Assembly and reforms in the Security Council in order to reflect the reality of the contemporary world. My delegation wishes to urge the President to sustain the momentum in the processes generated by the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly.

The menace of terrorism and local conflicts continues to impede peace, stability and development in many parts of the world. Innocent victims aside, conflicts have reversed the development gains of poor countries, and even reduced them to the status of donor-dependants. While deploring all acts of terrorism, it is important to recognize that poor countries, particularly those emerging from conflict, have weak capacity to fight terrorism. If global action is what is needed to fight terrorism and my delegation believes that this should be the case, efforts should be made to enhance the capacity of poor countries to play their own role in that battle.

After about 11 years of a violent and destructive civil conflict, Sierra Leone is now in the delicate post-conflict phase. It is in that phase that the root causes of the conflict should be addressed and the foundation for permanent peace, stability and sustainable development should be laid. In short, that is the phase in which the gains of the peace effort should be maximized, using a synergetic approach that incorporates development and other strands of generators of peace into peacekeeping. But this approach needs resources and planning beyond the traditional peacekeeping strategies that involve pulling out when the guns fall silent.

It is in that regard that my delegation is soliciting continued and enhanced support for post-conflict Sierra Leone. An important component of this appeal is that development and financial institutions should understand the multifaceted demands and delicate character of post-conflict situations and treat them as special cases. That means that those institutions should revisit their rigid and standard prescriptions, with the purpose of making them flexible and responsive to the special requirements of post-conflict situations.

Ten days ago, the Security Council extended the mandate of UNAMSIL to June 2005. The Government of Sierra Leone has endorsed the Secretary-General's assessment and recommendations regarding the benchmarks for the residual presence of UNAMSIL in the country. We note in particular that, over the next several months, the Security Council will review the residual functions against the capacity of the Sierra Leone armed forces and police to maintain security and stability effectively throughout the country. We hope that the review will also take into consideration the security situation in the subregion.

I would like to reassure the international community through the Assembly that we do not expect UNAMSIL to remain in Sierra Leone indefinitely. The Government of Sierra Leone is determined to ensure a smooth and seamless transition from UNAMSIL to the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces and the police throughout the country. The restructured army and the police have already demonstrated through training, discipline and performance that they are nearly ready to assume full responsibility for the security and safety of the people of Sierra Leone. But training is only a part of the total picture of readiness. For effective operational readiness, both the army and the police need logistical support and equipment. Accordingly, my delegation wishes to appeal to friendly nations for assistance to equip our security forces to enable them to function effectively. Meanwhile, for obvious reasons, the Government and people of Sierra Leone are encouraged by the prospects for consolidating the deployment of the United Nations peacekeeping mission throughout neighbouring Liberia.

Recent dialogue between, and among, the leaders of the Mano River Union also augur well for peace and stability in our subregion. We need the continued support of the international community in resuscitating the objectives and programmes of the Mano River Union, because, if fully functional, it can complement the efforts of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations in the subregion. In that connection, I would like to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his encouragement of the rejuvenation process of the Union.

The United Nations has already identified many of the root causes of armed conflict within States. With the assistance of the international community, efforts are being made to address those root causes. The objective is to prevent the recurrence of armed conflicts. My delegation believes that equal attention should also be paid to the root causes of armed conflict across States, including the senseless acts of international terrorism that are being perpetrated in many parts of the world. While prompt, effective and decisive measures are absolutely necessary to deal with the phenomenon, it is about time that we try to identify and address the root causes of such ignoble acts.

New challenges are emerging and new threats are being hatched in various corners of our world with unprecedented frequency. However, we must not forget the old, unresolved challenges and threats to human safety and security. Without prejudging the outcome of the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, Sierra Leone hopes that the Panel's report will help to throw some light on the probable link between what could be described as old and still existing threats and those now being characterized as new threats and challenges. Perhaps, as President Kabbah suggested at the Millennium Summit four years ago, the old and still existing challenges are taking on a new form and new dimensions. What we are experiencing is, perhaps, the transmutation of threats and challenges.

In speaking of old challenges and threats, the question of Palestine comes to mind. It has been on our agenda for far too long. We know that that is a complex issue. However, the longer it remains unresolved, the greater the risk of unending cycles of violence. Sierra Leone firmly believes that an equitable solution, in particular the establishment of an independent Palestinian State side by side with Israel within secure borders, would be a giant step towards peace and security, not only in the Middle East but also in the rest of our troubled and unsafe world.

Still in the area of existing threats to international peace and security, my delegation is disturbed by the tragic humanitarian situation in the Darfur region of the Sudan. We applaud the response of the African Union to the crisis and urge all stakeholders to do whatever is necessary to speedily resolve the conflict. But let me emphasize that the African Union would like to do more — and would do more if it had the resources. Accordingly, I would like to make an open appeal, on behalf of the African Union Commission, for financial and material support for the African Union to enable it to deal with the situation.

The Government and the people of Sierra Leone know from experience that ceasefire, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration are essential components of peace. But we are still faced with the daunting task of consolidating the peace, because peace goes far beyond the process of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants. The consolidation of peace — real peace — means improvements in the lives and livelihoods of all our people. It means jobs, food, education, health care, adequate housing and other social services. As the Secretary-General observed in his most recent report on the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, considerable progress has been made towards economic and social recovery. However, in order to sustain the process of consolidating peace and to facilitate the smooth transition from recovery to sustainable development, Sierra Leone needs continued support, particularly for vulnerable areas of the country.

We look forward to the 2005 comprehensive review of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals — a review that will coincide with the sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations. We in Sierra Leone will also be reviewing the state of our food security goal of ensuring that by the end of 2007, no Sierra Leonean will go to bed hungry. Our food security goal must be seen in the context of one of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, namely, the reduction of extreme poverty and hunger. Given the grave consequences of extreme poverty and starvation, those are realistic goals. They represent the minimum standard necessary to save lives. They are attainable.

We know that it is our responsibility to do more for ourselves. We also know the urgency of addressing the democratic deficit in international economic and financial decision-making. In our interdependent and increasingly globalizing world, economic and social inequities within countries are a reflection of unfair rules, unfair trade practices and an uneven playing field in international transactions. The Director-General of the International Labour Organization, Juan Somavia, was correct when he told the recent African Union summit in Ouagadougou that good national governance will not succeed unless we have good global governance.

Consumers need to share, in a more equitable manner with producers in the developing world, the benefits derived from their abundant natural and human resources. That means, among other things, fair prices and debt relief, all of which should have a positive impact on our capacity to reduce poverty within our respective developing countries.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Gábor Bródi, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Hungary.

Mr. Bródi (Hungary): I would like to take this opportunity to extend to you, Sir, our sincere congratulations on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session. You may safely count on my delegation's full support in the discharge of your important responsibilities.

Hungary is firmly committed to effective multilateralism as a key tool of its foreign policy. Well-functioning international organizations and institutions having broad political support in the international community can and should, indeed, play a significant role in addressing the challenges of our globalized world.

We are looking forward with eager expectation to the outcome of the work of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, set up by the

Secretary-General, to be finalized later this year. Addressing the complex and difficult tasks that we are facing today needs not only strong political will on the part of all of us, but also an improved and adapted multilateral framework of cooperation.

Only a system of international institutions whose activities and form of operation are renewed and adjusted to the realities of our contemporary world can be effective as an instrument in addressing successfully the threats and challenges.

Hungary remains strongly committed to making the United Nations more effective. To this end, the United Nations, including the Security Council, must adapt to the changing circumstances of the political landscape.

New and emerging threats, including international terrorism, the danger of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, transnational organized crime and failing States are all grave menaces. The role played by Member States in prevention and early warning should therefore be stronger than ever. These challenges are global or regional in nature and, in our view, the response to them must be at the same level. Without such enhanced cooperation among the members of the international community, all efforts are doomed to be fruitless.

Heinous acts of terrorism such as those that caused immense human suffering in New York, Washington, D.C., Bali, Istanbul, Madrid and, recently, the Russian Federation, should be considered brutal attacks against the values of democracies. By putting innocent lives at risk, they also seek to undermine the openness and tolerance of our societies.

Along with our partners in the European Union, Hungary strongly condemns all forms of terrorism. In this regard, we fully support the important work of the Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee. We hope that its reinvigorated activity, including planned visits by the Committee to Member States, will contribute to the enhancement of our capabilities in combating terrorism. It is of the utmost importance to provide assistance in strengthening the preparedness of those countries that are eager to tackle the menace originating from their territory.

Substantial work has been undertaken on freezing funds and financial resources to prevent the financing of terrorism. The United Nations has to continue to be a key player in that fight. To achieve real and tangible results in that regard, we have to ensure full implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions and the accession of the largest possible number of States to international conventions and protocols to combat terrorism. Hungary has done its part to that end.

The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery continues to be a clear and present threat to international peace and security. New discoveries of large-scale nuclear-weapon programmes, networks of illicit trafficking in nuclear material and technology and the ill-conceived policies of denial and deceit about the purpose and nature of such programmes remain a most serious concern to the international community. There is a growing recognition, shared by Hungary, that those programmes also represent the most serious risks of proliferation. The danger of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons falling into the hands of rogue States, terrorist groups or, for that matter, any other non-State actors that menace our world, gives rise to new, major security challenges. In that regard, we must act together in a decisive manner, both regionally and globally.

In that respect, Hungary strongly supports the implementation of Security Council resolution 1540 (2004), which calls on all States to establish effective national export controls. We urge full implementation of that resolution and are prepared to assist others in doing so.

In our fast-changing world security environment, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is and should remain the cornerstone of the universal non-proliferation regime. Along with our European Union partners, we are committed to safeguarding the Treaty's authority and integrity. In that context, we are looking forward to the Seventh Review Conference of the NPT next year.

We should continue our efforts in the field of conflict prevention and post-conflict crisis management. For millions of people in conflict areas, those efforts mean hope for peace and a better, more secure future.

We are confident that the joint efforts of the Iraqi people and the international community will lead to a democratic and prosperous Iraq living in peace with

itself and its neighbours. Hungary strongly condemns the terrorist acts and the kidnappings aimed at undermining the political and reconstruction process in that much-suffering country. The contribution of the United Nations is essential for success. Our Organization has already proven to be effective in advancing the political process when it seemed to have come to a standstill.

Hungary continues to contribute, along with coalition forces, to the stabilization and the improvement of security conditions in Iraq. We deem it important that relevant international organizations and institutions increase their joint efforts towards that end, including through the training of Iraqi security personnel.

At this moment, our priorities in Iraq must be to assist preparations for the national elections and the drafting of a new constitution. Security Council resolution 1546 (2004) provides a key role for the United Nations in the political transition process. Its ample experience in establishing democratic institutions, the rule of law, the promotion of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and electoral assistance can and should be utilized.

Hungary views the potentially successful realization of the presidential and the subsequent parliamentary elections in Afghanistan as important steps towards the normalization of the political situation in that country. We welcome the fact that despite unsatisfactory security conditions, progress is being made on preparations for the presidential elections to be held in October this year.

Hungary is deeply concerned about the continued violence in the Middle East, where substantial progress is yet to be achieved. We remain convinced that full and unconditional implementation of the road map offers the best chance for the parties directly involved to live side by side in peace and security. We urge all involved, including the Quartet, to redouble their efforts to that end.

The situation in the Balkans continues to remain at the centre of our attention. Overall developments in the region and the efforts of the international community have resulted in a calm but fragile political environment. In that respect, Hungary is committed to maintaining its presence in the international missions, in the service of peace and stability, in that region which is so close to us.

In that connection, we are following with serious concern the deterioration of the human rights situation in our immediate neighbourhood — in Serbia and Montenegro. It is particularly alarming that the number of incidents perpetrated against the non-Serb population, including the Hungarian community, is on the rise. Hungary once again calls upon the Serbian authorities to take the necessary measures to stop and to prevent those violent acts, as well as to identify, prosecute and punish the perpetrators of serious crimes of physical abuse, as well as psychological threats and intimidation. We are looking forward to the results of the international monitoring currently under way.

International protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms is at the core of the foreign policy of Hungary. It is not only an expression of support for the universal values we feel so close to our hearts. It is also an essential prerequisite for preserving human dignity and enhancing liberty in our contemporary world. Freedom of the individual and full respect for the rights of human beings are matters well above the authority of any given State.

In today's world, we could hardly find a country where everyone speaks the same language or shares the same culture, beliefs and traditions. The presence of different national, ethnic, linguistic and religious groups within the borders of a country is not only an asset but also a source of social and cultural enrichment. It is our firm belief that the United Nations, as the most comprehensive multilateral organization, has a major role to play in the promotion of respect for, and the observance of, human rights, including the rights of national minorities.

Against that background, the international community should continue to examine all possible ways to promote and establish an early-warning mechanism or a monitoring body dealing with minority-related situations. That should include the options of nominating a Special Rapporteur on minorities and elaborating a legally binding universal document to address shortcomings.

Next year, with a major event, will be particularly important for the United Nations. In the course of addressing the burning issues on our agenda, we have to take a long, hard look at our tasks, including the review of the implementation of the Millennium Declaration, adopted by heads of State and Government in 2000. In our view, the review exercise

requires careful preparation, vision, political determination and the courage to act. Hungary is ready and willing to take part in this process.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Archbishop Giovanni Lajolo, Secretary for Relations with States of the Observer State of the Holy See.

Archbishop Lajolo (Holy See): The Holy See is honoured to take part in the general debate of the General Assembly of the United Nations for the first time since the Assembly adopted resolution 58/314 on 1 July 2004, which formalized and specified the rights and prerogatives of its status as a Permanent Observer, a status which the Holy See has enjoyed since 1964.

It is therefore my pleasant duty to express sincere gratitude to all the Member States. In approving the aforesaid resolution, they signalled once again the particular bond of cooperation between the Apostolic See and the United Nations, already underlined by Pope John Paul II on his first visit to this Assembly exactly 25 years ago. In this significant circumstance, I am honoured to convey to you, Sir, and to all of you gathered here to represent your noble countries, the respectful and cordial greetings of Pope John Paul II. I bring a special greeting to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, and also to his worthy assistants. Their work, as recorded in the annual report of the Secretary General (A/59/1) with reference, above all, to conflict prevention and peacekeeping in the world, deserves the appreciation and gratitude of us all.

Several of the themes included in the agenda of the General Assembly may be considered essential for attaining the supreme objective of peace and for the future of humanity. To quote only a few: the United Nations and a new global human order; pursuit of the Millennium Goals; total and general disarmament; globalization and interdependence; international migration and development; human rights; and human cloning. I shall limit myself to a brief presentation of the Holy See's position regarding some of those issues.

Among the Millennium Goals, pride of place goes to the theme of poverty and development. I say pride of place, because it concerns the right to subsistence of hundreds of millions of human beings, surviving — as best they can — below the threshold of what is necessary, as well as tens of millions of undernourished children unjustly deprived of the right to live.

In order to find a lasting solution to those inhumane conditions, it is necessary to progress, under the aegis of the United Nations, towards a more flexible and more just international trade system. Furthermore, financial structures are needed which favour development and the cancellation of foreign debt for the poorest countries. Likewise, the results of scientific research and technology must be generously shared, especially in the field of health.

On that matter I need say no more, since the Holy See's position has already been presented once again by the Cardinal Secretary of State, at the conference on hunger and poverty held in New York on 20 September. I repeat only this: the urgency of the situation cannot tolerate delay. It is a question of justice.

Of immediate relevance to the supreme good of peace is the theme of total and general disarmament. If it is true that the production and sale of arms to other countries endangers peace, it follows that severe and effective international controls are needed. The commitment of the United Nations in that area is attested to by the various conventions it has supported with reference to weapons of mass destruction as well as conventional weapons. But we are only at the beginning of a long process, with huge economic interests as obstacles along our path towards peace.

The problem of weapons of mass destruction is clearly to be distinguished from that of conventional weapons; but the latter have a terrible and unending contemporary relevance in the numerous armed conflicts that stain the world with blood, and also in terrorism.

Regional armed conflicts are so numerous that there is no time to list them all. However, there are some that I cannot omit to mention. Above all there is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. That conflict is not simply contained within the narrow territorial boundaries of the region itself. Those directly involved are the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority, and they have the grave duty to demonstrate their desire for peace. With this end in view, a road map has been drawn up and formally accepted by both parties; may they proceed along it with determination and courage.

But that conflict is also followed with intense interest and often with passion by large sections of humanity. The Catholic Church, present in Palestine for 2,000 years, invites all concerned to turn their backs on any action likely to destroy confidence and to utter generous words of peace and make bold gestures of peace. And if peace is the fruit of justice, let it not be forgotten — as Pope John Paul II has reminded us — that there can be no justice without forgiveness; indeed, without mutual forgiveness.

Then there is the Iraqi conflict. The position of the Holy See concerning the military action of 2002-2003 is well known. Everyone can see that it did not lead to a safer world either inside or outside Iraq. The Holy See believes it is now imperative to support the present Iraqi Government in its efforts to bring the country to normality and to a political system that is substantially democratic and in harmony with the values of its historic traditions.

The Holy See is gravely concerned about various African countries scarred by bloodshed arising from mutual conflicts and even more from internal strife. They need active international solidarity: more specifically, and connaturally, the African Union needs to intervene authoritatively so as to bring all legitimate interested parties around a negotiating table. The African Union has already demonstrated its ability to act successfully in some cases: it deserves recognition and support.

I have mentioned the theme of terrorism, an aberrant phenomenon, utterly unworthy of man, which has already assumed global dimensions: today no State can presume to be safe from it. Hence, it seems obvious that terrorists can be effectively challenged only through a concerted, multilateral approach, respecting the *ius gentium*, and not through a policy of unilateralism. No one is in any doubt that the fight against terrorism means, first and foremost, neutralizing its active breeding grounds. But the underlying causes are many and complex: political, social, cultural, religious: for this reason, what is still more important is long-term action, directed, with foresight and patience, at its roots, designed to stop its spreading further and to extinguish its deadly contagious effects.

The Holy See, and the entire Catholic Church, is actively involved in this work. It is involved through its educational and charitable institutions, which, wherever they are, are committed to raising the cultural and social levels of the populations, without any discrimination, especially on religious grounds; it is involved through interreligious dialogue, which has grown in intensity ever since the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. The Holy See will always be grateful to the authorities of other religions that demonstrate openness to such dialogue, and also to the civil authorities that encourage it, without any political interference, respecting the distinction between the religious and the civil sphere and the fundamental human right to freedom of religion.

The right to freedom of religion is sanctioned, together with other fundamental rights, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 10 December 1948. Such fundamental human rights stand or fall together. And man stands or falls with them.

For this reason, every effort has to be made to defend them in all fields. For this to happen, one particular danger must be avoided, which is found today in various countries and social settings. It is the idea that these fundamental human rights, as sanctioned by the Universal Declaration, are expressions of a particular culture and are therefore highly relative. No, at heart, they are expressions of the human being as such, even if the fact remains that, at different times and in different cultures, they may have been and may still be differently applied, in more or less adequate and acceptable ways.

Among the fundamental rights, or rather foremost among them, as the Universal Declaration explicitly states, is the right to life of every individual. The Holy See could say a great deal about the right to life of every individual, because the essence of its message is the gospel of life.

The question of human cloning comes under the same broad heading. In a few weeks, this General Assembly will resume its debate on human cloning. In this respect, the Holy See is pleased to reaffirm its commitment to support the advancement of medical science, conducted always in a manner that respects human dignity, because it offers healing and cures for various diseases. With this end in view, the Holy See reiterates its support for the procurement and use of adult stem cells and believes that the way forward is to

draw up and implement a clear convention that will result in a comprehensive ban on human cloning.

> "Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,"

So begins the preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is one of the many undeniable merits of the United Nations to have proposed to the conscience of all humanity, more than 50 years ago, these secure principles for progress towards peace. Over the years, however, the United Nations has needed to adapt its procedures to take account of developments on the world political scene so that its work for the promotion of peace can become more effective. The first results of the high-level commission set up for this purpose by Secretary-General Kofi Annan were published last June. The Holy See will be able to offer some explicit evaluation on the occasion of the debate on the subject to be held next week.

For now, I should simply like to recall Pope John Paul II's words for this year's International Day of Peace. He reminded us that humanity today is in a new and more difficult phase of its genuine development, and he called for a greater degree of international ordering. This could be brought about by giving organizations like the United Nations special prerogatives to facilitate action to prevent conflicts at times of international crisis, and also, when absolutely necessary, humanitarian intervention — that is, action aimed at disarming the aggressor.

Yet, the greater degree of international ordering could be achieved still more effectively if the United Nations were to rise to the status of a moral centre, where all nations of the world feel at home and develop a shared awareness of being, as it were, a family of nations.

Now and in the future, the United Nations can count on the Holy See to be not only an attentive Permanent Observer, but also a travelling companion, ever ready to support its complex and difficult activity, and also to collaborate in a spirit of freedom and friendship with all the Member States.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.